EMAIL SUBJECT LINES

Developing Effective Subject Lines for Your Campaigns

The Subject Line introduces your message or offer and must convince the recipient to open the email and read more. On average eight times as many people read the Subject Line as the body copy, so for your marketing to be effective, it is critical to create great Subject Lines. The best ones are descriptive, credible and provide the reader with a reason to explore your message further. Testing is important, as it is often difficult to accurately predict a winning Subject Line and you may be surprised by what you learn. While there are no absolutes and a wide variety of Subject Lines may be effective at different times to different audiences, InfoUSA has compiled the following basic guidelines.

EFFECTIVE SUBJECT LINE DEVELOPMENT REQUIRES TIME & DISCIPLINE.

✅ Make Subject Line testing a critical part of the overall testing plan for every campaign. Strategy that works today may not tomorrow so ongoing improvements must be made.

✅ Determine Subject Line guidelines for one-time single messages and for ongoing messaging (e.g. monthly e-newsletters, relationship lifecycle messaging, behavior-based campaigns). Once you've determined your guidelines and formatting, try to be consistent for a more polished brand image.

✅ Understand and determine metrics. Subject Lines are all about open rates, as the whole point is to engage your subscribers enough so they open and read your email. While tests may appear very close (e.g. 22% open rate vs. 21.2%), even minor differences can compound and make a big difference in results over time.

SUBJECT LINE DOS

✅ Convey value
Make sure the reader knows the email is worth their time – mention discounts and promotions.

✅ Be concise
Keep Subject Lines short and punchy and ideally under ten words. Most marketers aim for 35-45 characters that clearly indicate message content and/or highlight special offers.

✅ View whole package
The From Line and Subject Line work together. The From Line should concisely convey who you are (i.e. be a recognizable name, company, group, newsletter, etc.). The important thing is for the From Line to be credible, so the recipient knows who you are or trusts who sent the email. This way, you can be more fun, creative or direct with your Subject Line, since they already trust the source.

✅ Consider your "pre-header" text
Pre-header text is also known as a secondary Subject Line for your mobile users. The pre-header should accurately state the main idea of your message – if there's an offer or discount, summarize it in the pre-header.

✅ Make congruent
Your Subject Line must be consistent with the message copy or offer, or the recipient may distrust future emails.

✅ Personalize appropriately
1. Use first name sparingly (e.g. appropriate transactional messages).

2. Identify targeted up-sell opportunities (e.g. call plan, subscription, etc.).
3. Deliver program values up front (e.g. loyalty programs).

✔ Test
Determine if the Subject Line alone will attract spam filters by running through a Preflight test (InfoUSA offers this service).

✔ Tell a story
In multi-message campaigns, you can "tell a story" (e.g. Part I, what happens next, etc.) to engage the recipient.

✔ Brainstorm ideas and have fun
In the waves of emails everyone receives, a creative and relevant Subject Line will stand out.

SUBJECT LINE DON'TS

✔ Don't be vague
Instead of "Our December eNewsletter" use "December eNewsletter: 10 Tips for Permission Marketing."

✔ Don't attract spam filters
Avoid too many symbols and spam keywords. There isn't an absolute list of words not to use, so it is always best to run a spam filter test.

✔ Don't be deceptive
In some situations, it is best to dispense with the creativity or mystery and tell them exactly what they are getting (e.g. RE: Information you requested).
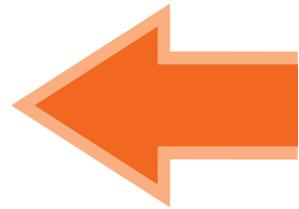
TESTING IDEAS
Here are a few ideas to include in your testing plan to determine which is the most effective.

✔ Branding vs. no branding
Additional branding may make your email stand out. This could be the name of your e-newsletter, your primary product or service, etc.

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✔ Personalize vs. non-personalized
Does it make sense to include name, location, or other customer-specific information such as past products/services purchased.

✔ Short vs. long
Use the general guidelines but test what works best for your audience; long Subject Lines may be better in some cases.

✔ Functional vs. Lifestyle messaging
Some people buy a product because of price or features; others do because they want to be a trendsetter or believe it somehow suits them.

✔ Informative vs. engaging
You can tell people what the email is about or you can engage them with questions or commands.

TESTING PROCESS

✔ Create a statistically significant test
When creating your test segments, make sure they are large enough. Typically 5% of the entire list (per market segment) may be required to obtain meaningful test results.

✔ Keep all other variables constant
Content, creative design, day of week, time of day and so forth – these variables should be tested against each other when testing Subject Lines.

✔ Test amount
Consider testing three times to validate results.

If you would like to learn more about writing effective Subject Lines, or developing email campaigns please contact an InfoUSA email expert at 888.297.0899.